

Gaibandha-5 by-polls today with EVMs

MOSTAFA SHABUI, Bogura

The Election Commission is going to hold the by-election to the Gaibandha-5 constituency today using electronic voting machines amid confusion among many voters about how to use the devices.

Many locals also expressed fears of violence during polling.

Independent candidate Nahiduzzaman Nishad claimed he was attacked by supporters of Awami League candidate Mahmud Hasan Ripon on Monday.

"There are a lot of outsiders in the area working for the AL nominee. We were informed that they also received visitor cards for polling booths. They will no doubt influence the election," he said.

Similarly, Jatiya Party candidate HM Golam Shaheed Ranju said, "On top of the existing apprehension about EVM machines, there are thousands of hired goons working for the AL candidate. I fear they will either take control of the polling centres or prevent voters from entering the centres altogether."

"We have informed the police and the election commission officials both verbally and in written complaints," he added.

When asked, AL nominee Ripon claimed he did not know about any attack on Nishad.

He further said, "There is no scope for outsiders to enter the polling centres. So, I think the voting will be held in a peaceful manner."

This correspondent visited several areas of the constituency and a large number of voters said they did not know how EVMs worked.

Marzina Begum, 52, a resident of Dakkhin Buraill village in Phulchhari upazila, said, "I don't know anything about voting through EVMs. How would I? I've never voted using this machine."

Jobaidur Rahman, 28, a resident of Bogervita village in Saghata upazila, said, "The two upazilas, Phulchhari and Saghata, that are under the Gaibandha-5 constituency are mostly made up of remote char areas. The majority of the population here does not have any idea about EVMs. They [voters] will surely face difficulties during voting."

According to Assistant Returning Officer Abdul Mottalib, 1,285 police personnel, 1,740 ansar members, four BGB platoons, and nine Rab mobile teams have been deployed in the area to ensure voters' safety.

A total of five candidates are vying for the parliamentary seat, which fell vacant following the death of deputy speaker Fazle Rabbi Miah on July 23.

Voting will start at 8:00am, and continue till 4:00pm without recess at 145 polling centres in Phulchhari and Saghata upazilas.

The constituency has over three lakh voters in 17 unions.



Two battery-run three-wheelers being driven against traffic on the Kanchpur Bridge in Narayanganj on Monday. Just the day before, a battery-run three-wheeler collided head-on with a microbus on the bridge near this spot, resulting in the deaths of five people.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

IMF cuts 2023 global growth outlook

Warns major economies to stall as countries grapple with fallout from Ukraine war, spiralling cost of living

AFP, Washington

Global growth is expected to slow further next year, the IMF said yesterday, downgrading its forecasts as countries grapple with the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, spiralling cost of living and economic downturns.

The world economy has been dealt multiple blows, with war in Ukraine driving up food and energy prices following the coronavirus outbreak while soaring costs and rising interest rates threaten to reverberate around the globe.

"This year's shocks will re-open economic wounds that were only partially healed post-pandemic," said International Monetary Fund economic counsellor Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas in a blog post accompanying the fund's latest World Economic Outlook.

More than a third of the global economy is headed for contraction this year or next, and the three biggest economies — the United States, European Union and China — will continue to stall, he warned.

"The worst is yet to come and, for many people 2023 will feel like a recession," said Gourinchas.

In its report, the IMF trimmed its 2023 global GDP forecast to 2.7 percent, 0.2 points down from July expectations. Its world growth forecast for this year remains unchanged at 3.2 percent.

The global growth profile is its "weakest" since 2001, apart from during the global financial crisis and the worst of the pandemic, said the IMF.

This reflects slowdowns for the biggest economies, including a US GDP contraction in the first half of 2022 and virus lockdowns in China on top of a property market crisis.

A key factor behind the slowdown is a shift in policy as central banks try to bring down soaring inflation, with higher interest rates starting to take the heat out of domestic demand.

Growing price pressures are the most immediate threat to prosperity, said Gourinchas in the report, adding that central banks are now "laser-focused on restoring price stability".

Global inflation is expected to peak at 9.5 percent this year before dropping to 4.1 percent by 2024.

But misjudging the persistence of

inflation could prove detrimental to future macroeconomic stability, he warned, "by gravely undermining the hard-won credibility of central banks."

While current challenges do not mean a large downturn is inevitable, the fund also warned many low-income countries are either in, or close to debt distress.

Progress toward debt restructurings for the hardest-hit is needed to avoid a wave of sovereign debt crisis. "Time may soon be running out," said Gourinchas.

The IMF has cut forecasts for the two biggest economies, United States and China, as well.

US economic growth is pegged at 1.6 percent this year, 0.7 points below the fund's July forecast, due to an unexpected contraction this year.

"Declining real disposable income continues to eat into consumer demand, and higher interest rates are taking an important toll on spending," the IMF said.

The Federal Reserve has been raising interest rates aggressively to tamp down surging inflation, which is slowing economic activity. And the central bank has said more increases are likely to come.

Inflation rings alarm bells

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drove up food prices across the country while exchange rate depreciation increased the cost of imports.

In July, inflation was 7.48 percent.

Inflation declined in September, thanks to a slight drop in prices of some food items. However, food inflation was still 0.9 percentage points higher than that in July and 3.9 percentage points higher than that in September last year, he said.

Zahid further said non-food inflation increased further in September this year, suggesting that the inflationary momentum has not dissipated yet.

"Domestic supply shocks are continuing with power outages and gas shortages disrupting domestic production. The consequent productivity slowdown will fuel inflationary momentum... A prolonged drought has adversely affected Aman cultivation.

"No single policy intervention can

be adequate under circumstances like these," he said, suggesting that supply management needs to be prioritised with food and energy security at the top.

He also stressed the need for the protection of vulnerable groups to alleviate the burden of the cost-of-living escalation.

"The government's laudable initiative to subsidise food to 10 million poor families through Family Cards must continue, be scaled up, and better targeted," he added.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director at the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said the high inflation is a result of global uncertainties.

"Inflation is also high in other countries in Europe and the US... "We had anticipated that the inflation rate would be higher."

Asked about inflation in rural areas, Mansur said the markets in urban areas are usually less volatile

than those in rural areas.

The prices of commodities in rural markets, especially the small ones, shoot up all of a sudden, he added.

At the briefing, Planning Minister MA Mannan said Bangladesh, like other countries, is facing problems due to the ongoing global volatility... there will be no food crisis in the country if the agricultural production remains good.

The government is trying its best, he said, urging consumers to spend money judiciously.

"We have to save foodgrains, money, electricity and water. At the same time, we should prevent wastage," he said.

Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning, said inflation rose not just in Bangladesh, but also in other countries such as India, the UK, and the US.

Inflation here is now at a tolerable level, he claimed.

Save money, produce food

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The prime minister made the statement delivering her introductory speech in the weekly meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Committee (Necoc) held at the NEC Bhaban in the city. She joined the meeting virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

"We must increase food production and preserve those. We must give special attention to preserving and processing food. Our land is very much fertile, and we must increase our food production," she said.

She reiterated her call to maintain austerity in every sphere of life, avoiding any unnecessary expenditure.

"All must be cautious and maintain austerity in using electricity, fuel, water, gas and everything else. I will request every family to go for savings in whatever they can. This is applicable

to our government as well," she said.

She said the government would not go for any unnecessary expenditure.

"We will just use whatever we need, not more than that. We do not have any scope for that. Because I saw anxiety among world leaders and heads of organisations. So, we must maintain enough cautionary steps," she said.

She said that the country needed to be free from the impact of the recession that is stemming from the Ukraine war.

Hasina also requested the Planning Commission not to spend their valuable time discussing inflation every time.

"Because many countries around the world do not discuss this issue [too much]. The USA and the European countries...do not discuss very much about the issue in their own

countries," she said.

"We also do not need any extensive discussion on this, but efforts should be there to keep prices of essentials within people's reach. We will do whatever is needed," she said.

About undertaking any project, she said that all must think about the maximum benefit for the people.

"There is no need to jump in to undertake any unnecessary project when the fund is available. We must take projects following scrutiny so that we could get some return from that project, which will be beneficial to the country," she said.

The prime minister stressed the need for completing the ongoing projects as quick as possible, even if they need some extra money.

She also asked all the ministries to identify projects, which can be implemented slowly.

BNP ready for Ctg rally, AL vows to 'resist violence'

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BNP standing committee member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday said the rally would take place in a peaceful and festive manner.

"There will be a lot of rumours. Please don't lose patience and fall into any trap. Don't be incited by any provocation," Khasru called upon the party leaders and activists.

The BNP leader was speaking at a press conference at the party office at Nasiman Bhaban on the city's Nur Ahmad Road.

Party sources said leaders and activists from Chattogram's adjacent districts have already started reaching the city to join the rally. The work on setting up the stage at the venue was going on yesterday.

Khasru said BNP men will show up for the rally braving all hurdles and harassment.

"Despite lots of problems and pressure, our leaders and activists have been working to make the grand rally a success. No one will be able to stop the rush of the people towards the rally venue," said the senior BNP

leader.

The opposition party earlier alleged that many cases were filed against the party leaders and activists since it started organising protests across the country in late July.

Asked about the ruling party leaders' warning of resisting violence by BNP, Khasru yesterday said, "According to the country's constitution, only the law enforcement agencies can do the job of maintaining law and order and no party can do it. The law enforcement agencies should carry out their duties properly so that no one can take any advantage."

He said the BNP has already asked its leaders and activists to hold the rally peacefully.

"We do politics for the people, and the people's strength is much more than that of sticks, rifles or sharp weapons. We don't need any weapons as people are with us. Those who are isolated from the people try to do politics with sticks."

Party Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir will address the rally as chief guest. Senior leaders

of the party will also be present.

The opposition party held its last meeting at the Polo ground on January 9, 2012, when party Chairperson Khaleda Zia addressed the rally.

BNP sources said the leaders and activists have been instructed to travel to the rally venue in groups to avoid arrest or harassment. They have also been advised not to carry any sticks.

Police sources said a large number of law enforcers, both uniformed and plainclothes, and members of a crisis response team will be deployed in and around the venue to avert any untoward situation.

On Monday, AL leaders warned that the BNP would be resisted if it indulged in violence in the name of holding any rally.

"We hope that the BNP will hold their rally peacefully and that's why we did not schedule any programme for that day. We have seen earlier that they committed violence and engaged in anti-state activities in the name of holding programmes. If such incidents

take place, we will resist," Moslem Uddin Ahmed, president of the Chattogram South unit AL, said at a press conference.

AJM Nasir Uddin, city AL general secretary, said party leaders and activists would remain alert to any possible violence by the BNP and would resist it.

Meanwhile, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, yesterday said his party was ready to face the BNP on the streets and in elections.

"BNP leaders are still daydreaming about the fall of the government and making ridiculous statements demanding the government's resignation," he said at a press briefing at his Secretariat office.

He said the AL had been on the streets, it is still there now, and will remain on the street in future.

Quader said the BNP's dream of waging a movement to oust the government by "capitalising on the people's sufferings caused by the ongoing global crisis" would not come true.

Lightning strike kills 5, hurts one in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A lightning strike yesterday killed five men in Solagari area of Pirganj, Rangpur.

Brick kiln workers Nazmul Islam, 18, Siam Hossain, 20, Sahadat Hossain, 25, and Rashedul Islam, 24, were covering clay bricks from rain, and Abdul Zabbar, 25, was cutting grass nearby when the lightning struck, killing them at the scene, said Abdul Awal, officer-in-charge of Pirganj Police Station.

Mehdul Islam, another brick kiln worker, was injured and taken to a hospital, he added.

DGHS reports 2 deaths from Covid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two elderly patients died with Covid-19 in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday, said a press release from the Directorate General of Health Services.

The health directorate also reported 460 new cases of coronavirus.

The new cases were detected after testing 5,193 individuals.

Of those reported dead yesterday, one was male. One was aged between 51 and 60 years and the other was between 81 and 90.

China to support coal mining in Bangladesh

Barapukuria MD says after meeting Ambassador Li Jiming

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

There will be more Chinese support for coal mining in Bangladesh, said Saiful Islam Sarkar, the managing director of Barapukuria Coal Mining Company Limited.

He said this after meeting Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming, who visited Barapukuria coal mine and Barapukuria Coal Fired 525MW Thermal Power Plant in Parbatipur upazila of Dinajpur yesterday.

The facilities are currently being run by Chinese companies.

Grid automation is the need of the hour

Says Nasrul Hamid

BSS, Dhaka

State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid yesterday said automation of the national grid is a time-befitting demand as it will adjust demand and supply of electricity automatically.

"Connection between information technology and smart devices will ensure safety of the power transmission management," he said while addressing a workshop at Bidyut Bhaban as chief guest.

The state minister said there must be integrated planning for power sector infrastructure development. "Many achievements can be foiled due to lack of coordination," he said.

Two separate context papers on Smart Grid, Electric Vehicles and Global Context were presented to the workshop.

BERC may hike bulk electricity

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The members will sit again today to decide, he said, adding that one of the five BERC members was against raising the price citing inadequate power generation.

Contacted, BERC member Mohammad Bazlur Rahman said even if the bulk price was hiked, it would not affect consumers.

However, a BERC official said the price might be hiked by between 10 and 16 percent.

The current bulk electricity price is Tk 5.17 per kilowatt-hour, he said, adding that the new price could be around Tk 6.

The commission's Chairman Abdul Jalil told The Daily Star that the distributors were making profits. "If they apply [for permission to adjust the prices], the BERC will act accordingly."

People across the country are enduring hours of power outages every day as 58 of the 148 working power plants have been dialled down generation because of fuel crises over the past week.

Prof M Shamsul Alam, senior vice

president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said, "It will be illegal if the BERC increases the electricity price even by Tk 0.01... They wouldn't be able to justify the price hike at a time when the people are enduring frequent load-shedding. When Bangladesh Power Development Board sought the price hike in May, there was no outage."

Based on the PDB request, a public hearing was held on May 18 at the BIAM Auditorium in which a technical evaluation committee formed by the BERC recommended increasing the bulk price by 58 percent.

The government later informed the BERC about a Tk 17,000 crore subsidy for PDB.

According to law, the price of electricity should be announced within 90 working days of the public hearing. The period ends tomorrow.

The technical committee observed that it would not be possible to implement an increased bulk price unless the price was adjusted at the consumer level.

Bulk electricity price was increased the last time in February 2020.